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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies some basic propositions regarding teacher preparation utilized by a curriculum development team in the development of a competency-based teacher education curriculum in reading and language arts. The propositions underlying this development effort had their genesis in the research and literature in teacher education, were selected by an interdisciplinary and interinstitutional group of educators, and have been operationalized in Project RELATE. These propositions have implications as guidelines for the development and use of teacher training materials. It is recommended that educators adopt, use, and research these and other propositions in an effort to identify and thereby give further direction to the development of teacher training materials. An 18-item bibliography is included. (Author)

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PROJECT *RELATE*: AN IDENTIFICATION AND TEST OF SOME PROPOSITIONS REGARDING THE PREPARATION OF TEACHERS

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PROJECT RELATE: AN IDENTIFICATION AND TEST OF SOME PROPOSITIONS REGARDING THE PREPARATION OF TEACHERS

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"It is the best of times, it is the worst of times..." This statement, a provocative social commentary, sums up the seemingly antithetical positions taken by various groups of educators regarding recent trends in the preparation of teachers. In no area is this ideological contrast so apparent as in the area of competency-based teacher education. Dr. Edward C. Pomeroy, illustrative of one of the many "best-of-time" advocates, speaking at the 1972 AACTE Convention, said:

> Performance-based teacher education, sporadic and scattered as it is, has the potential for restructuring the education of teachers. It bespeaks the emerging future and points the way for teacher education (Pomeroy, 1972).

Meanwhile, the National Council of Teachers of English, illustrative of the "worst-of-time" advocates, refused to behavioralize their discipline, saying in effect that

such an act would be folly, if indeed, not dangerous, given current understanding and trends (Maxwell and Tovatt, 1970).

Despite one's particular allegiance with either the best-of-timers or the worst-of-timers, one thing remains clear: At no point in our brief history has the field of teacher education been so caught up in the throes of childbirth. This heightened level of program development, though far from universal, is exciting. The true significance of this curriculum development effort lies in its potential for clarification of current progress and needs in the field of teacher education. Questions raised relative to teacher education have dealt with three fundamental issues: (1) Is teacher education in a preservice sense necessary? (2) If it is, what attitudes, knowledges, understandings, and skills ought to be taught? and (3) Given these concerns, what form should the instructional program take?

Those charged with the responsibility of developing a program of teacher education must confront these central issues. Depending upon the proclivities, penchants, and philosophical dispositions of developers, these questions will receive varying degrees of attention. Professionally sharing, not only the answers to each of these questions, but also the procedure through which

each of the issues was approached, will, we are confident, lead to heightened understanding and wisdom (in the Lawrence S. Kubie [1959] sense of understanding tempered by humanistic values) in the education and preparation of prospective teachers.

This article will communicate several propositions growing out of the work of the RELATE development team as it confronted these fundamental issues. These propositions are currently being tested and tried in Project RELATE, a competency-based teacher education curriculum in reading and language arts at Indiana University.

Descriptively, Project RELATE is a new year-long program for juniors majoring in elementary education. Although implementation of the project varies on the four campuses currently using these materials, on Bloomington's campus the project combines the undergraduate reading and language arts methods courses (9 semester credit hours) with student teaching (15 semester credit hours). Methods instruction is linked to student teaching in a local elementary school so that the student is able to apply language arts methods while actually working with children in the classrooms. The project is organized around a comprehensive teaching-learning model. Methods courses are related and sequential.

RELATE is built around three major approaches: (1) a process approach to instruction, (2) a decision-making approach to teaching, and (3) a competency-based approach to teacher preparation. These approaches move the student systematically through eleven units, from a highly structured to a less structured situation, from little independence to much self-direction, from experience in making decisions regarding one learner to experience in making decisions regarding several learners. Readers interested in a more detailed description of the project are invited to examine the project materials and refer to existing publications (Newman and Harste, 1972; Newman and Harste, 1973).

In terms of the fundamental issues posed earlier, the development team did not choose to involve itself deeply in the first issue; namely, whether or not there was a need for a preparation program. Other groups of educators have recently explored this issue (Popham, 1971; Bausell and Moody, 1971; Moody and Bausell, 1973). Although this question is a major issue in teacher education, the RELATE team echoed in accord that while improvement was needed, abandonment was not the answer. Instead, the team hypothesized that the focus, content, and quality of teacher preparation should be altered. The RELATE team saw as its charge increasing the

effectiveness of the existing mechanism through a clarification of basic goals.

This decision led the team to consideration of the remaining two issues central to the preparation of classroom teachers: namely, what ought to be taught and, given these outcomes, what form should instruction take? Consideration of these issues led to the following propositions. Each of these propositions has been implemented and/or built into Project RELATE curriculum materials.

> *Proposition One. The production of an effective teacher is a highly personal matter, centering primarily upon the development of competency to enact and operationalize a personalized set of beliefs.*

Effective teacher education must concentrate its efforts upon the production of teacher behaviors that have meaning in the belief system of the prospective teacher. In Project RELATE students begin by defining what they believe constitutes reading and the language arts. Students search the professional journals, discuss the issue freely with peers, classroom teachers and their professors to come up with a working but personalized definition. The production of this definition not only clarifies their beliefs, but forms the basis upon which students study the remaining portions of the curriculum. Decisions as to which learner

characteristics to diagnose, and which objectives to set are all governed by what the prospective teacher sees as being the purpose of reading and language arts. The competencies developed in Project RELATE are thus personalized for the student. The focus of the program is upon the development of those competencies which will assist the student in operationalizing his definition. Students understand that teaching is a personal enterprise and that, along with certification, comes both professional responsibility and professional reward.

Proposition Two. The production of an effective teacher is dependent primarily upon the development of the student as an instructional decision-maker.

Teaching involves decision-making. Decisions made in the area of objectives, strategies, organizational patterns, and resources determine the degree to which the student's beliefs regarding reading and language arts will see fruition in the classroom. The power of the decision-making model for teacher preparation lies in the fact that:

1. Its primary focus is instructional and as such reflects the primary purpose of the school;
2. Its instructional focus is the learner, thus keeping attention attuned to the primary purpose of the school;

3. As an instructional model its utility overrides any specific content area, thus making it an acceptable perspective by which to study the multiple aspects of the school;
4. As an explanation of the teacher's role it places in proper perspective such elements as instruction and learners, and in so doing meaningfully organizes a complex set of events; and
5. As an explanation of teacher behavior, it reflects and encourages professionalism and accents the many responsibilities of the professional teacher.

Students come to realize that the highly visible process of teaching, as seen in classroom observation, is in reality the tryout and the result of a less visible plan of action involving decisions at many different levels. These decisions are made, hopefully, as a result of information collected regarding this group of learners and how they learn. This process of teaching, the student understands, is cyclic; that is, the tryout and results of this instructional event become information which can be used in revising instructional decisions.

Further, the student understands that the most obvious and key decisions that a teacher must make are:

(1) determining which objectives to set; (2) determining which strategies to use; (3) determining which organizational pattern to follow; and (4) determining which materials or resources to employ. The first decision that the teacher must make is to determine an appropriate objective for the learner. In order to make this decision, basic facts regarding the learner must be accumulated. Having compiled these facts, the teacher is then in the position to select or create an appropriate objective. Students understand that if the teacher collects improper or irrelevant data on the learner regarding his characteristics, inadequate objectives for the learner will probably result. Likewise, correct facts leading to a correct decision as to objectives may still be followed up by an inappropriate instructional strategy to reach the objective. The extension of this model permits explanation of both successful and unsuccessful instructional acts. As such, the decision-making model broadly conceptualizes teaching and affords the user a diagnostic paradigm for continued professional growth.

> Proposition Three. *The production of an effective teacher is a developmental process extending over a prolonged period of time which includes not only the understanding of a competency but extended experience and practice to develop competency skillfulness.*

Basically, there are two components to the acquisition of a teaching competency: acquisition of the cognitive aspects of the competency, and acquisition of the physical abilities of the competency or the skillfulness aspects of competency acquisition. Much of what has been produced in the name of competency-based teacher education training materials to date have focused upon the first aspect of competency attainment. This is obvious when one examines teacher training materials and their reliance upon paper and pencil instruments to measure student performance (cognitive acquisition). It is the feeling of this developmental team that in order to truly have a competency-based teacher education curriculum, all competencies must be demonstrated in the classroom with learners. Knowledge about a competency, it was felt, cannot be equated with skillfulness in demonstration of competency. Unless the student can demonstrate mastery of a competency in the classroom setting, mastery should not be assumed. This position does not preclude paper and pencil tests measuring concept acquisition; rather, it suggests that competency mastery involves measures of both concept acquisition and skillfulness.

By the same token it was felt that the conventional teacher education program, while doing much to encourage concept attainment, did little to encourage

competency skillfulness. Hudgins' review of research (1972) suggests that the attainment of a complex skill necessitates a greatly extended period of practice involving presentation and identification of the concept, practice in stimulus control situations, and finally, practice situations without stimulus control. Project RELATE adopted the following three-step strategy for the presentation of the competencies in its program: (1) formal presentation of the competencies through outside reading, class discussion, or formal instruction; (2) simulated presentation and practice of the competencies through the use of video-tapes, films, and other media; and (3) extended practice of the competencies in a variety of classroom situations with a variety of groups of elementary children. Because Project RELATE's curriculum spirals in its sequence, students must constantly revisit competencies presented earlier. To date, data collected suggest that the model is working. Student perceptions of their competency acquisition continues to improve in direct relation to their frequency of practice.

Inherent within the RELATE process is the assumption that an education environment be created in which the student feels free to practice, learn, and to use Combs' (1965) term, "become." In order to create such an environment, classroom teachers cooperating with

RELATE instructors have relinquished many of their traditional supervisory teacher roles while assuming new co-instructor roles. Students are not assigned to one classroom teacher, but throughout the program are given the opportunity to work with several teachers at various grade levels. Supervising teachers are cast in a new role, one that most assuredly causes some problems, but one which eliminates at least a part of what was identified as wrong with teacher education in the past.

> *Proposition Four. As teaching is largely a rational act, the production of an effective teacher requires attending to the personal growth of the individual involved, centering primarily upon the development of cognitive schemes for organizing and understanding complex phenomena.*

This proposition, generally supported in a variety of research writings (Colladarci, 1959; Smith, 1961; Turner, 1971) reflects a departure in terms of teacher education as traditionally perceived. In the past each student was assumed to synthesize his own learning experiences. This synthesis was supposed to appear majestically at some point in his program, probably during student teaching. That this assumption is false seems all too obvious for those of us, who like Jackson (1969), have had the experience of extended visitation in the classroom. The RELATE

proposition states, in effect, that teacher educators have the responsibility of providing a cognitive structure or organizational framework to students so as to facilitate their personal quest toward The Art of Making Sense (Ruby, 1968). As such, the proposition is in direct contradiction to the recent trend in teacher education of producing protocol materials that present, in ever-fragmenting detail, smaller and smaller concepts (see Gliessman, 1972). The RELATE team felt an obligation to students to provide them with a conceptual base which permitted them to weigh and value the sundry concerns in teacher education. This framework serves as an "advanced organizer," to use an Ausubelian term (1969), and as such provides a schemata whereby students can rationally understand, weigh and value trends in teacher education. To use an example for clarification here, let us examine the recent surge of interest in teacher behavior, specifically "classroom questioning" as delineated by Sanders (1966). Most assuredly this is an important issue, one of many of which any teacher or prospective teacher should be cognizant. Yet undue stress on "questioning" as a topic in a methods course throws it greatly out of perspective. "Questioning" can never, nor was it meant to be, predominate and overshadow such teacher behaviors as setting objectives and planning the

learning environment. "Questioning," in the RELATE program, is presented as one aspect of instructional strategy to be used during implementation of specific objectives. The RELATE model, in short, provides a much needed framework which allows the student to organize, weigh and value the myriad educational trends that bombard him in his role as teacher. Unless educators provide such a framework in their program, the prospective student is easily swayed, confused, or both.

These then are some of the major propositions that underlie the RELATE teacher education curriculum. If these positions coincide with what you believe, we invite you to use our curricular materials at your institution. If they do not, and if you have some "By golly, this is what I believe" propositions of your own, we cordially encourage you to modify these materials or, for the courageous, to develop your own. We encourage response, reaction, and no remorse, for this is indeed the best of times in teacher education if we can only learn to use it appropriately.

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